



BUDGET COMMITTEE



Judd Gregg, Ranking Member
<http://budget.senate.gov/republican>

Contact: Betsy Holahan (202)224-6011

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Senator Gregg's Senate Floor Remarks on the Reconciliation Bill and the Gregg Amendment to Extend the "Doc Fix" Through 2013

Our debt is growing so fast that it's going to be very hard for us, five or six years from now, to be able to sell our debt at a reasonable price, in my opinion, and we're going to find that maybe some people don't want to buy our debt.

It was a very significant event this week when it was determined that the debt issued by Warren Buffet was going out at a lower cost than the debt issued by the United States of America. That's the first time that anybody could remember something like that. That's a very clear statement by the markets that they're getting very worried about how much deficit and debt this government is running up.

And now we pass a bill which adds \$2.6 trillion to the spending of the United States government, alleging it's paid for, but we know it's not going to be. It creates new entitlement programs which we know won't be fully funded, and even if it were paid for, it takes resources which should be used to reduce the debt, especially in the area of making Medicare more solvent, and uses them to expand new programs.

This event, as I've described it, is an asteroid of debt headed at our country and the simple fact is that the effect it's going to have will be that we will have more difficulty selling our debt and that the deficits and debt that we pass on to our children will be extraordinary and that their ability to have a higher standard of living will be being reduced as a result.

But the point, of course, is that the enacted health care bill -- on top of all the other egregious things it does in the area of fiscal policy and running up debt, creating massive government that we can't afford, being intrusive in everybody's health care delivery system, undermining the ability of small businesses to offer insurance, raising premiums, raising taxes on people not only earning \$250,000 a year but earning less than \$250,000 a year -- is replete with special deals.

On top of all that, this new health law, as Senator Corker said, puts pressure on the states and local communities and tasks them to spend money which they don't want to spend and which isn't reimbursed. That's not fair. It is called an unfunded mandate. We ought to have a law around here against doing what this bill does -- this bill basically runs over the unfunded mandates law that already says we won't do that.

As I said earlier, another thing about this health law, which I find extraordinary, is that it doesn't address the elephant in the room, or one of the elephants in the room, relative to the costs of health care in this country -- which is the fact that we are not adequately reimbursing our doctors. Our doctors are going to receive a \$285 billion cut over the next ten years, a \$65 billion cut over the next three years unless we correct it. It would cost these amounts to bring doctors' reimbursement back up to a constant level. Each year we adjust that payment so that doctors get some of the money that they deserve, but this does not even keep them up with inflation.

But this reform, which is supposed to be a comprehensive resolution of health care, leaves the doctors out in the cold. It means every year they're going to have to come, hat-in-hand one more time, asking for something that they shouldn't have to ask for, which is a fair reimbursement for their services. And we will every year, hopefully, address it, but it's not right that we've been voting on health bills here that don't even account for that.

And why wasn't it put in? Well, it wasn't put in because if it had been put in, this reconciliation bill could not meet the budgetary rules that give it the special protection that allows it to come to the floor of the Senate, and it would have been in deficit over the first ten years, by at least \$100 billion, even using the gamesmanship scoring that the other side of the aisle has used relative to the big health care bill.

So this isn't fair to the doctors. The doctors deserve better than this. And we should correct this right now as part of this process. I mean, this trailer bill has the title "fix-it bill" on it. Well, one thing we should definitely fix is the fact that the doctors are getting shortchanged here. So let's fix it.

And that's what my amendment does. My amendment says, okay, Democrats allege that the big bill generates a surplus. Let's use part of that surplus to make the doctors whole for the next three years. And so it's a paid-for amendment. I can't imagine anybody would want to oppose this. I mean, after all, after we complete this bill, immediately after we complete this bill, we're going to do a one-month extension to try to correct the doctor problem.

Well, how inconsistent, how fundamentally hypocritical is it for us to pass a major health care reform bill and a reconciliation bill and then in the next breath, literally in the next breath, within the next 24 hours, this body will take up a bill to give a one-month extension to the doctor fix. I think it's one month. Well, that's not right. So let's do it now. Let's do it in this reconciliation bill. Let's do the doctor fix. I've come up with a proposal here that will take care of the doctors in a fair, forthright manner for three years. That's my amendment.

I'll just summarize it again. We know that doctors are being shortchanged. They deserve fair treatment. And it's pretty obvious if you're going to do health care reform, it is the appropriate place to correct the issue of doctor reimbursement -- not on the next day in another bill.

This is a forthright and fully paid-for attempt to address the problem of doctor reimbursement. If it is passed, it will reimburse the doctors at a fair rate for the next three years. I can't understand why we wouldn't want to do something like this.